

# HAMILTON ASSOCIATION.

Inaugural Address of J. Macdonald,  
Esq., M. D., President.

DELIVERED NOVEMBER 17, 1881.

The first regular meeting for the season of the Hamilton association was held on November 17, 1881 in the council chamber at the City Hall, there being a full attendance. Mr. Mollwraith, the retiring president, occupied the chair.

After the reading of the minutes, Mr. Mollwraith briefly returned thanks for the kindness and support he had received from members during his incumbency of the presidential chair. These had rendered his duties light and pleasant. He then introduced the president elect, Dr. Macdonald, who then taking the chair read the following

#### ADDRESS:

GENTLEMEN: My first duty to-night is to express my thanks to the Hamilton association for the kindness which has led its members to put upon me the honor of opening this year's session. I am well aware that it becomes me to present even this acknowledgment with diffidence. I cannot lay claim to any special fitness for the place of president of an association such as this, which aims at a character, literary, scientific and philosophic. I have accepted the preferment partly as a token of good will towards a man of my age, but chiefly because I regard it as showing the wish of the members to interest in their transactions a larger number of their fellow-citizens than has hitherto taken part with the association. They who are most closely identified with the association, who have taken the most active share in its work, have not sought this place for one of themselves, but have advanced to it one whose claim upon their regard is old citizenship, but who, having found his own professional duties and cares fully equal to his time and opportunities, has certainly not earned a

name among his neighbors or his kinsfolk as a follower of science. I can only hope that the association will not have cause to regret its choice greatly. I can assure it of my best endeavors to fulfill the duties which it expects of me. I have great pleasure in congratulating the association on its assembling again with not lessened numbers, and with its members entering on the winter in the enjoyment apparently of good health, and many of them prepared to take their part in such work as may arise for them. It will be satisfactory to the friends to know that so far as profitable occupation for the society is concerned, the prospects of the season are good, the opportunities for interchanging and enlarging information will not be few nor unworthy of their time and attention. I believe provision has been made for every evening in which the association is to meet, and we may begin the year with sanguine expectations of a pleasant as well as a profitable season. You see that the committee which undertook the management of this important and troublesome matter have not been idle. The friends who form it are to be congratulated on their success and thanked for their industry. I have to thank the gentleman who constitute that committee for procuring the promise of papers on a variety of subjects which will perhaps exceed in interest those of any previous year of the existence of the society. And this can be said without casting any reflection on the efforts of former times. It is the declared object of the association, first of all, to improve itself, and we hope it is to show improvement in its work during this and every other year.

Many of the papers which it will be our privilege to listen to are the work of men who are abreast of the day in the things on which

# INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

they write, whose information, therefore, is of great value to us, and whose ideas on those topics are well worthy of our examination. Those gentlemen are willing to impart to us their own knowledge, and it is becoming that we make to be seen our appreciation of their labors, for our sake, by a good and regular attendance at the meetings of the association.

I say for our sake, but I do not wish to emphasize the word "our." It is by no means the purpose of the association to constitute as members "a select few." The friends who had the most to do with its formation, or, as I should perhaps rather say its reconstruction, are guided by a desire to spread through the community a taste for inquiry, a cause, the growth of a desire for accurate knowledge of certain topics, an imperfect inadequate information regarding which is highly prejudicial, we may say dangerous.

May I not say, too, that it is the desire of the association to aid in the recovery of our people from the impetus with which we have committed ourselves to a course of self-indulgence, of frivolity and dissipation in late years? These are vices which, in past times, characterized chiefly the extremes of society; now they threaten to corrupt the whole social fabric. Of old there often issued from among the middle classes grave reflections, and sometimes severe satires upon the classes at either end of the social ladder, because of their excesses. Can we at present say that it is even doubtful if there is a grade among us which can with propriety pronounce judgment upon the conduct of the others. We may hope that such an association as this of ours, if it have a successful history, will be among the means of giving a more healthy turn to the minds and to the manners of us all, especially to the young, to show us not only that life is worth living, but that it is worth living earnestly. I have spoken of the desirableness of more accurate knowledge regarding certain topics. We are called upon by many to govern our thoughts and lives by scientific and philosophic speculations with which we have, for the most part, a most inadequate acquaintance, and with regard to which it seems difficult to obtain a definite conception. Startling propositions are made to us. It is demanded of us that we give up old habits of thought, change old beliefs, and cultivate and establish a new morality, which includes some habits very few indeed, except among bestial life. Indeed to this sort of life it is that, it seems, we are required by those who have assumed the place of instructors among us, to assimilate ourselves.

It is certainly needful for us to have a knowledge of the grounds on which such por-

tantous propositions rest, and one of our objects here is to examine those grounds, as occasion arises, to the best of our ability. Some may say to us, why not let these things alone, they are too deep and dangerous for general discussion, they are beyond the average comprehension, they will have their day, and die? This last we believe, but in the meantime this advocacy of a new order of things, or rather disorder, is working evil in the midst of us, and we may not refuse to examine its pretensions, as we may not deny that it is our duty to serve our generation. Besides the questions come to us for our decision whether we will or no, and we may not shun them without bearing the shame of fearing them.

Indeed it is time that those who turn away with distrust from the teachings of our new lights changed their attitude, and addressed themselves to uphold more actively what they themselves believe. It is time for those who stand upon the old ways to be as much alive to our surroundings, as they are who would try to make us walk in the new.

Truly those new ways, as far as they are shown to us, seem both hurtful and unclean, and they who walk in them, boasting as they go of the light of their reason, are forever as sadly stumbling as if they had no light at all; putting forth discoveries which in no long time are found to be mistakes, coming to definite conclusions from which they not unfrequently have to depart. They advise us to believe nothing which cannot be proved by numbers, yet they give expression to the most decided convictions of their own, which cannot be proved by that test. To convictions, indeed, which, by the admission of a large section of them, are not provable to us. "I know and can know nothing more than my dog," is a maxim which has been formulated. The maxim contains a very old confession, that man's knowledge has its bounds; but the old confession is more reverently expressed, and is still reverently held by very many who are by no means foolish people. In what I have said I do not mean to have it understood that this association is to occupy itself with religious discussions. None would object to that sentiment more strongly than the religious men amongst us. For such discussions, they would say this is not the place. But I do mean that we should endeavor to acquaint ourselves with things which are made to have a bearing on the moral and religious condition of the people, so that we may be able, with a better understanding and to better advantage to speak our thoughts on the relation of those things to morals and religion when it is needful for ourselves or for others that we should do so. It must be confessed that our scientific men and others,

who see neither planner nor plan in the universe, have been, and are, to no small extent objects of dread, as well as dislike to many; but when we come near these scientific men and their followers, and get them away from their speciality, they seem to become as other men. They make mistakes and misrepresentations at times like the rest of us; they even show a certain confusion now and then, which we would not expect from men of their pursuits, which require exact modes of thought and expression. For example, Mr. Huxley, at the late meeting of the British association at York, was severely sarcastic at the expense of the "system" which required no one knew how many creations, for no one knew how many times. "Well, why not? Can he prove anything better? Are many creations more incredible than one? or are we, shut up in our little bodies and with our narrow comprehensions, justified in ridiculing the idea of any creation? In truth, Mr. Huxley did not fairly state the case against the "system" at which he was having his fling. It by no means excludes evolution—possibly it may exclude his evolution—while it most positively asserts creation. Did not Mr. Huxley, farther, in so expressing himself, pre-judge the case between himself and the "system" in his own favor? Must a doctrine be worthy of ridicule because it does not accommodate itself to his preconceptions? Again, Sir John Lubbock, in his address as president, referring to evolution, said: "Now we see at a glance that the stripes of the tiger have reference to its life among jungle grasses." So it may, but not because of Sir John Lubbock's evolution, although an evolution may be concerned in it. One cannot help asking why the necessities of jungle life did not produce stripes in many more of the denizens of the jungle as well as the tiger, and one cannot help seeing that the tendency to stripes is nearly universal in the cat tribe, whether in the jungle or not. The most distinguished exception to the striped character of the feline is the lion, whose uniform color and other characteristics have seemed to some a sufficient reason for separating him with a genus by himself.

For the color of the lion, Sir John Lubbock also accounts. He is sandy because of the necessities of his desert life. But lions do not inhabit the deserts only, or even chiefly. The African continent is not all sandy desert and lions are found every where in it; and besides he is not the only tawny animal in Africa. Many of the larger animals of that continent, whose bulk and habits do not admit of their dwelling in sandy deserts, are of the same color. For example: among the

antelope this color prevails, chief among which is the eland, a tawny animal.

Once more, Professor Tyndal speaks of the "problem of problems: how to afford reasonable satisfaction to the religious sentiment immovably fixed in the nature of man;" and he proposes that it should be relegated entirely to the domain of the emotions, its proper sphere, while the intellect should be kept free from embarrassment by it. It has been well said in reply, that we cannot lavish our reverence, our love, and our trust on a God who, according to our science, has no being; and may we not ask at the same time, how came man to be involved with an element of character so groundless and yet so ineradicable? Man is said by Oken to be the sum total of the animals. The religious sentiment is surely no where seen in the animals, from out of which he is said to have proceeded. These have no vain expectations, whereas man will cling to a hope which becomes more ardent and more definite, and a more important feature in his daily life, in proportion as the influence of religion and the knowledge of it grows within him. But if scientific men have been led to hasty conclusions with respect to matters which, so far, seemed beyond the bounds of science, their work within their own domain has put the world under enduring obligations to them. Every year is more fruitful in results from their continued investigations, and the field of knowledge has by them been so well prepared that now an unpretended cultivator in a corner of it obtains a return for his labor greater far than he had been looking for.

The telephone seems to have grown in this way so to speak, under the eye of the discoverers of this mode of magnetic influence. Mr. Bell had other ends in view when he lighted upon the transmission of speech by wire from ear to ear for miles. He was busying himself about obtaining, by magnetism, signs for ideas for his deaf mute pupils, and lo, he found the means of conveying words to the ears of those who were not deaf. Lately too we have heard of the diascopes, by means of which as much may be done for the eye, as the telephone has done for the ear. This instrument seems to be of Parisian birth, and of course the first use of it has been to enable a sick Frenchman, from his darkened room to see the performance in a distant theater while by means of the telephone he could at the same time hear the play.

Among the things of interest which we owe to science of late years is the light thrown upon the formation of metallic ores. The crystalline rocks with which these are found associated have been subjected to microscopic examinations. Of these rocks sections

are made, so thin as to be quite transparent. These sections are placed under glasses of highly magnifying power, and thus are not only the essential constituents of the rock, but others which are accessory. The processes of decomposition and disintegration are observed, and recognised as originating the accessory material already mentioned, and which by analysis is found to consist of metallic ores, and so are seen the steps by which metals are formed from the rocks in which they originally appear. Thus it is seen that our scientific enquirers have beaten their predecessors, the astrologers and alchemists, in at least one respect. Their efforts at the discovery of the elixir of life have been rather a failure so far, but they have made some progress in the search for the philosopher's stone. Who knows but that some day we may know how to decompose certain quartz rocks for ourselves, and so, by further chemical operations, to turn them into gold. Alas, then, for the value of the "precious metals" now so-called. There will be no difficulty whatever in keeping them in the country. Much good may they do there.

Time would fail to tell all the advantages which we enjoy from the unremitting labors of scientific men, and in this meeting it is not necessary to do more than refer to them. Every one here has personal and daily experience of the vast activity which those laborers have added to human life. Nay, will not all be ready to assert the importance of the general good of the continuance of those labors? Knowledge has done so much for us, has carried us on so far, and has caused to arise in us such expectations that if it should fail to advance now it would be felt to be more disastrous than if it had never come to our help at all. Having been told of steam and electricity and their various uses, our desire "for more" is greater than ever. Having given man such power, know-

ledge must further look to it that there is a way open for the use of that power. It cannot be said to have, so far, made man's future look brighter than before, and I do not know that it has, on the whole, increased his happiness as much as is claimed for it, for there seems as great a disproportion as ever between man's desires and the means of giving them satisfaction, and the vanity of his desires is made manifest as often as it was wont to be; but it has made itself necessary, in as far as it has increased his power for good and evil. The men who have most knowledge have most power for both these ends, and if that power is left in the possession of a few they will certainly abuse it, to the grief of the rest of us, just as the classes of men who have had exclusive possession of knowledge have done in all ages. Knowledge leads and men must follow, but it is of consequence to the usefulness of the leader, and to the safety of those led, that the relations of the parties should be reasonably intimate, and that they should be in clear sight of each other at least.

Thus far in commendation of the purpose of this association, and perhaps those who listen may have come to the conclusion that, considering all which has really been said, the time occupied has been sufficiently long. I shall make only one more remark. It relates to another important benefit which comes from seeking understanding. I mean the discipline and culture which we get by the way. Knowledge puffeth up, but the obstacles which are found in the way of its attainment in any perfection may humble not a few of us, and convince us of the danger of basing too much on the uncertain foundation of what we know. It is long since it has been said, we know in part. Little else can be said now. That which is perfect has not appeared above our horizon as yet.

